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ABSTRACT

This report describes first year activities and results of a project comparing two early interventions with 102 children (grades 1 and 2) at risk for emotional or behavior disorders. Fifty-nine children received an intervention involving social skills lessons given on a whole-class basis at least twice a week with information sent home regularly regarding the lessons. The parents and teachers of the remaining 43 children met regularly to do action research focused on the individual child. The parent teacher action research approach involved parent-teacher equality, use of the action research cycle, parent liaison, planning mutual parent-teacher goals for the child, consistency between home and school, and planned transitions. This intervention also utilized the Making Action Plans process to set individual goals for each child. The action research cycle (plan of action, action, reflection, and practical theory) becomes the structure that guides each team's meetings. Preliminary results indicated by the teacher reports show that children in both groups decreased in total problems, with the action research group showing greater decreases. Parent reports suggested both groups decreased in total problems and externalizing behavior. Direct observational findings found the action research group decreased in problems and increased in on-task behavior, whereas the social skills training group increased in problems and decreased in on-task behavior. (DB)

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Fitzgerald, McConaughy and Kay
Florida Mental Health Conference, February 23-26, 1997

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Achieving, Behaving, Caring: The ABC's of Early Intervention

The ABC Project at the University of Vermont is one of 13 research and demonstration projects in the prevention of serious emotional and behavioral disorders funded to date by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. We are in the middle of our second year of work. Our research methods involve qualitative case studies imbedded in a quantitative, matched-group design.

Our eleven schools are in rural areas of northern New England, where we are focusing on children in the first and second grades. There are 36 classroom teachers working with us; 10 of those teachers have a multi-age classroom, generally grades 1 and 2, although there is one 2-3 combination and a one-room school which includes grades 1-4. We recruited these teachers through school- or district-wide informational meetings, where we invited them to work with us.

In each geographic area we employ, train, and supervise one or more parent liaisons, people from the community who provide specific support and encouragement to participating parents to help them carry out their roles. All but one of the seven women currently in this position are parents themselves. Initially their jobs involved recruiting parents, visiting homes twice a year to complete parent measures, arranging and attending meetings between parents and teachers, and providing the between-meetings support that parents needed. This year, five of the parent liaisons have also been trained to facilitate parent-teacher meetings.

Our sample consists of 102 children, 72 boys and 30 girls, all of whom

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exhibited either externalizing or internalizing behaviors in Kindergarten that indicated that they were at risk of developing emotional or behavior problems. At the end of the school year, Kindergarten teachers completed the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD; Walker & Severson, 1990). Parent liaisons visited the parents of identified children to explain the project and obtain informed consent; in Year One, 91% of the parents readily agreed, and in Year Two, 94%. Kindergarten teachers then completed the Teacher Report Form (TRF; Achenbach, 1991). After matching the children by gender, classroom assignment, and TRF total problem scores, our data manager randomly assigned one of each pair to Intervention A and one to Intervention B. In Cohort One we have 18 such pairs, and in Cohort Two we added 25 pairs, for a total of 43 matched pairs; there are also 16 additional children assigned to Intervention A.

Intervention A involves social skills lessons given on a whole-class basis. The first and second grade teachers selected the curriculum they would use, or used the school-wide curriculum already in place when the project began. We asked that the lessons be taught at least twice a week from October through May, for a minimum of 15-20 minutes at a time, and that the teachers regularly send home information to all parents describing the social skills the children were learning. All children in each first and second grade class receive the social skills lessons.

Intervention B brings the parents and classroom teachers together regularly to do action research focused on the individual child. Parent-Teacher Action Research (PTAR) combines the benefits of parent-teacher teams with the systematic structure of action research. There are seven essential components to our PTAR approach: parent-teacher equality, the action research

cycle, parent liaisons, mutual parent-teacher goals for the child, consistency between home and school, and planned transitions.

Our PTAR teams begin with an adaptation of the MAPS process, which stands for Making Action Plans (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992; O'Brien, Forest, Snow, & Hasbury, 1989); the child's parents and teacher describe his/her strengths, likes and dislikes, and then express their dreams and fears for the child. With this information, we help each team set its goals for that child for the year, identifying the indicators they will use to measure progress toward those goals.

The action research cycle then becomes the structure that guides the team's meetings (see attachment). The parents and the teacher collect data that is pertinent to each of their goals, observing and interacting with the child, and making notes in ways that suit each of them best. Some use a notebook, others a checklist; several parents have a set of questions about school that they regularly ask the child. They bring their data to meetings and share their reflections with one another, asking themselves the analytic question, "What does this mean?"

From this process of reflection and analysis, the parents and teachers develop their "practical theory" about the child's behavior. This stage of the process requires that parents and teachers be honest with one another, sharing their beliefs and talking about why they agree or disagree. They then develop action plans to test their theories; occasionally they agree to try out one theory and then another to see which might be more accurate. They each carry out actions they have agreed on, and continue to collect data, following the cycle again and again throughout the year. The facilitator keeps the team meetings focused on the goals and the action research process, and the parent

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liaison provides the support that the parents need to do their part as equal members of the team.

Our 43 teams work through this action research cycle at differing levels of proficiency. If crises occur, either in the family or in the school, all team members listen and give one another support. New data uncovered by the crisis may be incorporated into the action research cycle, and may lead to a revision in the goals for the child. Parents and teachers learn to accept compliments from one another, as well as to give gentle criticism. Several parents have commented that they feel much more comfortable with the teacher than they ever have with other teachers.

We pay special attention to transition times. When a child moves from first to second grade, or from school to school in the middle of the year, we engage the new teacher in the process. We encourage the new teacher to observe in the child's old classroom, providing pay for substitute teachers if necessary in order to make this work. Wherever possible, our parent liaison and facilitator stay with that child's team.

References

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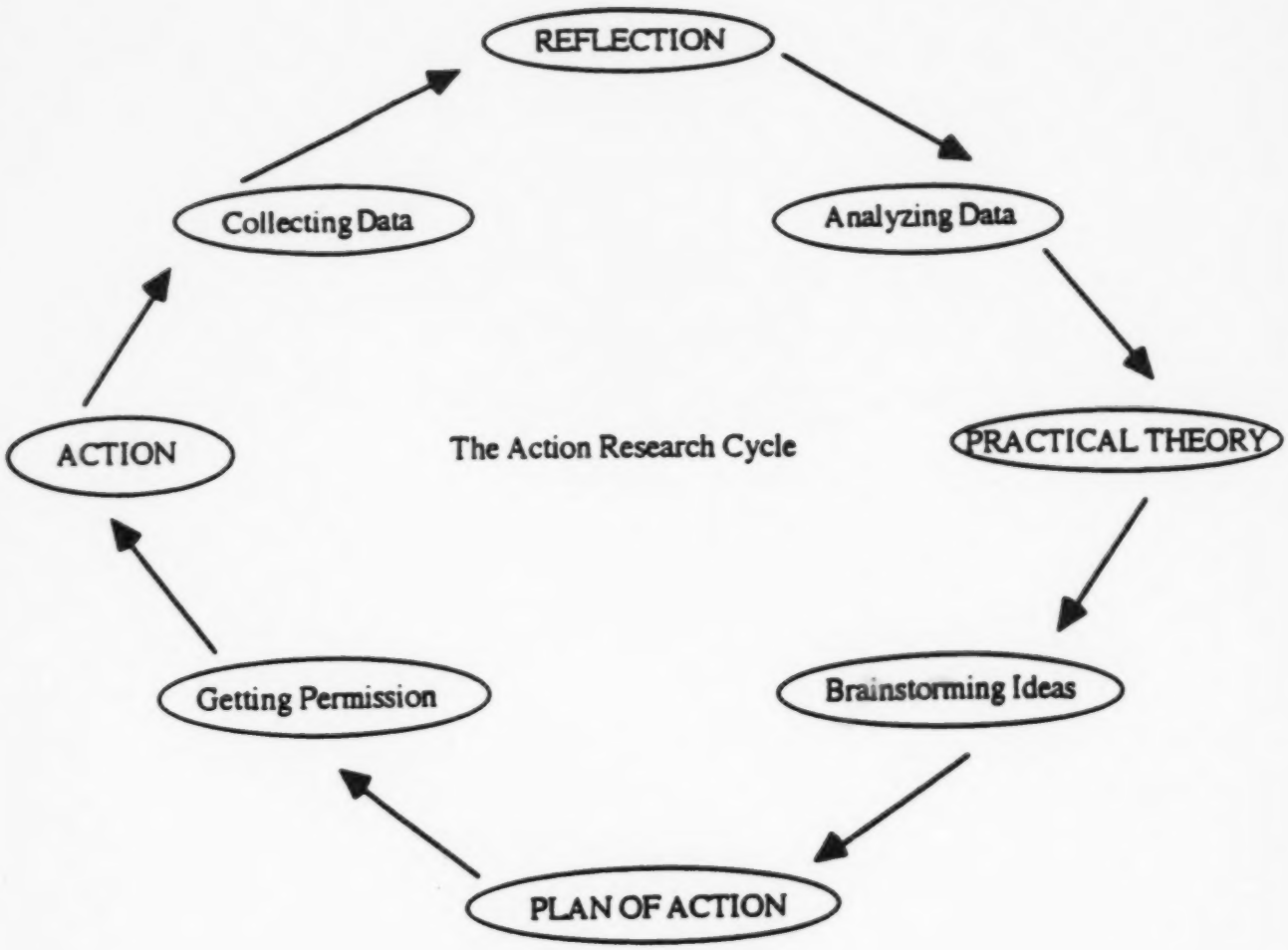

The Action Research Cycle

Figure 1
Screening and Assignment Process for Cohort 1

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Gate 1
13 teachers; 7 schools
Kindergarten teacher SSBD rankings of Internalizers & Externalizers
N = 77</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Gate 2
Kindergarten teacher SSBD ratings on CEI and CFIAMB and
demographic matching criteria for eligible sample
N = 56</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Gate 3
Parental permission obtained (91% agreement)
Kindergarten teacher completes TRF
First grade teacher agrees to participate
N = 50</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Gate 4
Assignment to Intervention A or B (matched by gender, teacher,
SSBD Internalizing or Externalizing, & TRF total problem score)
N = 36</td></tr>
<tr><td><u>Intervention A</u>
Social Skills

N = 18
(Extra N =11)</td><td><u>Intervention B</u>
Social Skills
+
PTAR Team
N = 18</td></tr>
</table>

ABC PROJECT

SUMMARY OF FIRST YEAR RESULTS

Teacher Reports:

- Both groups decreased in total problems, internalizing, and externalizing behavior (TRF and SSRS)
- Group B showed greater decreases than Group A in externalizing, social problems, delinquent, and aggressive behavior (TRF)
- Both groups increased in social skills (SSRS)

Parent Reports:

- Both groups decreased in total problems and externalizing behavior (SSRS)

ABC PROJECT

SUMMARY OF FIRST YEAR RESULTS

Direct Observations:

- **Group B decreased in total problems, hyperactivity, and aggressive behavior**
- **Group A increased in total problems, hyperactivity, and aggressive behavior**
- **Group B increased in on-task behavior**
- **Group A decreased in on-task behavior**

ABC PROJECT

SCREENING PROCEDURES AND OUTCOME MEASURES

SCREENING PROCEDURES	ASSESSMENT TIMES
Kindergarten Teachers:	
Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD)	Spring
Teacher's Report Form (TRF)	Spring
QUANTITATIVE MEASURES	
First & Second Grade Teachers:	
Teacher's Report Form (TRF)	Fall + Spring
Social Skills Rating System (SSRS-T)	Fall + Spring
Classroom Observers:	
Direct Observation Form (DOF)	Fall + Spring
Parents:	
Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL)	Fall + Spring
Social Skills Rating System (SSRS-P)	Fall + Spring
Family Empowerment Scale-School Version (FES-S)	Fall + Spring